Tales of Grizzled Seekers of Goddess Gold

ALL meetings of gold miners are interesting. They are always impromptu. There are no formalities, no admission fee and no program—just a happen-so of a group of grizzled men who have chased the goddess Luck for long years over bleak mountains, through lonely gulches and across burning deserts. Adventures by the scores have been theirs. They just happen to meet in the back of a store, in a cabin, alongside a trail or in any kind of a habitation, and it is always a sort of experience meeting of the most adventurous set of human beings on earth. The writer counted himself very lucky to be able to sit in one when the miners were in a talkative mood.

Colonel John Foster was in a little group that gathered one recent night at the store in Chloride Camp, Arizona. He has been a prospector for gold and silver in Arizona for nearly two generations. He probably is the oldest prospector in that state and is the last of the men who gave their youth to developing the millions on the Comstock half a century ago.

"Speaking about bull luck in stumbling on to a rich mine," said he, "there was Bill Campbell.

"Bill came out from a teamster job in Chicago, along about 1895, as poor as Job's turkey. Any man without Bill's luck would have been kicked plumb into kingdom come, instead of the fattest diggings in the Southwest.

"It was like this: Bill was hauling freight from Tucson over to a little silver camp in the Sonora range. He was about as clumsy as they make men, and he never made a trip without being bitten or kicked or trodden upon by his team. He was so blamed poor that he had to stand it all or die of starvation.

"One mule in the string, Old Sam, was a regular devil. The brute knew that Bill was afraid of him, and never missed a chance to kick at him.

"One day Bill started from Tucson with a heavy load, bound to Smith's camp. The distance was 80 miles, and part of the way the road was hardly more than a trail along the side of the mountains.

"Half a dozen good teamsters had turned down the contract. Bill took it because the pay was more than double that on any other route.

"We thought the outfit would roll over the grade, but Bill succeeded in getting over 60 miles of the road. Then he was at Porcupine, a narrow ridge along which the road ran, and on each side was a deep canyon. At no place was the road more than a couple of feet wider than a wagon, and the grade was very heavy.

"Half way across something started Old Sam, and he began to kick. Bill whipped and swore. Sam only made his heels fly faster, and at last managed to get outside the traces. Then, as if satisfied with the fun he had had, the brute lay down right in the trail and defied Bill's every effort to get him up.

"A couple of Mexicans happened along. At Bill's invitation they took a hand with balky Sam. One of them gathered dry grass and piled it close to the mule's hind quarters and set it on fire. It took Sam about two seconds to change his position and land his heels on Bill's stomach with a force that sent Bill over the edge of the road and down the bank. He dropped more than 30 feet down the side of the mountain.

"Where do you think that cuss landed? Why, on the edge of the great Daylight mine!

"The Mexicans, in pulling up grass, had torn away earth revealing pay rock beneath it. While Bill was rolling around on the ground in pain he got a glimpse of the gold-specked rock, but he kept his mouth shut.

"When he had investigated he wrote to his brother in 'Frisco to gather up all the cash he could and get down to Arizona as soon as possible. The first thing we knew a gang of men were at work developing the Daylight mine. It paid $1,000 a month almost from the start. Along about 1900, it paid a clear $3,000 a month. Bill died rich, in Europe."

"Speaking about mules," said white-haired Colonel George Layton, who was mining alongside men who made great fortunes in golden placers long before the present generation of scientific miners came on the scene in Central California, "that reminds me of the time that the late United States Senator Leland Stanford was tried for murdering the best mule in Placer County. It must have been along about 1851. Stanford was a young strip of a fellow with a pretty girl wife out from Wisconsin. He saw he couldn't make a cent at running a law shop. The miners made their own law, and book law wasn't worth a cent there.

"So Stanford bought a wagon load of bacon, flour, molasses, beans and dried apples at Sacramento, hauled them up to Michigan Bluffs, in Placer County, made a tent out of his wagon cover and opened a store. There wasn't much doing during the first few days. Stanford used to lie down in his tent and sleep until some customer woke him up. It meant hanging for any one to get caught stealing in those days, when one could make $10 a day by a little industry at panning out the gold.

"One day a fellow struck camp on the finest burro seen at the Bluffs in weeks. The fellow unpacked his belongings and turned his burro loose to pick whatever he could find in the way of grub. The straw around Stanford's tent attracted his attention first. Then he began nosing around inside. It wasn't three minutes until the beast had his nose in the dried apple barrel.

"After eating all he could get away with, he sauntered off down to the creek and took a good drink of water. In half an hour there was a dead burro.

"The owner of the jack wanted Stanford to pay for the beast. Stanford got mad, and demanded pay for his dried apples. After wrangling over it all the afternoon, they agreed to leave it to a jury.

"First the stranger was tried for stealing dried apples and was acquitted on the ground that a man was not criminally liable for the acts of his burro. Then Stanford was tried for killing the jack and acquitted on the ground that he was not criminally responsible for the swelling properties of his dried apples.

"Then they tried the damage case each had against the other, and the jury reached the conclusion that it was a split and fined them both the drinks for the court."

The discussion returned to the luck that has found some rich mines in the West. Major William B. Sanders, a famous soldier of fortune in the mining fields, had a settled opinion on that score. Major Sanders is best known in the Southwest as the promoter of the immense copper formation at Jerome, Arizona, where former United States Senator Clarke has been taking out copper that has sold for more than $20,000,000 a year for a long time. He was once called to Mexico by President Diaz to pass on the value of silver mines that were opened when Cortez conquered Mexico centuries ago.

"I've been mining now for 42 years, and I've come to the conclusion that luck in mining means an ability to look deeper into the earth than other folks," said Major Sanders. "I could sit here all night and tell you illustrations to prove my idea, but one will do.

"Along at the time of the Modoc Indian War up in the lava beds, near the Oregon line, I was working a claim in Plumas County. The mine was called the "Billy." All the boys there agreed with me that the Billy would make me rich. I kept at work on it every day until all my $1,100 capital had gone into the tunnel for grub, tools and nitroglycerine. I wrote back to my brother near Rochester, New York, to lend me $600. I kept steadily at work.

"The miners came and saw me sweating and blasting away in my tunnel. All of them said I was dead sure to get into rich ore in a week or more.

"Well, when my borrowed money was gone I had put two years into the work. I was worried because I knew that my brother had a growing family to support and he had mortgaged his place to help me. The tunnel was then 180 feet in the rock.

"I became discouraged, and got sick wondering why I had ever been such a fool as to keep pegging along there, when I might have got rich, as the other miners had done by the dozen, down in Calaveras County.

"One morning, as I was gathering up my tools to quit, a businesslike man came up. He asked to see the mine, which was mostly in solid rock without timbering. After he had closely examined both walls, he casually asked me if I wanted to sell.

"I feigned indifference, and, after calculating 190 feet of tunneling at $10 a foot, answered that I might sell if I got my price.

"'Well, what's your price?'

"'Twenty-five hundred dollars,' I replied, with my heart in my mouth.

"'Come down to town and get your money,' was the answer.

"That night I went to the tavern at Plumas, ate off china dishes and slept with $2,500 under my pillow, and in clean sheets for the first time in two years. Next morning the purchaser asked me to help him put in a couple of shots, and, of course, I agreed. When we got to the tunnel he examined the wall and selected a point about 100 feet from the mouth.

"The minute he laid hold of the sledge I saw he was an expert miner. In six hours we had two holes in the rock. When the shots went off I could hardly keep myself from running into the tunnel. After the smoke had cleared away I was the first on the spot. There lay exposed a body of ore sparkling with the golden bits. The ledge was afterward found to be three feet thick. It ran more than $100 to the ton.

"I had dug my tunnel just a yard away from the gold vein a year before. I had been in and out of that tunnel thousands of times and never knew how near I was passing the big fortune which I had hoped, prayed and dreamed for every minute in all those months.

"I had such a fascination for wanting to know how big a fortune I had missed, because I couldn't see into the rocks as my buyer had done, that I lay around Plumas for a few weeks.

"Ore that went as high as $1,200 a ton was taken from my mine. In six weeks the buyer got more than $13,000 out of the property, and in a year it ran to even $100,000."

Major Joe Bucks had his say also. He is a wonderful old man. He mined precious ores on the Pacific Coast since before the Civil War. He was in Peru with Miggs when Andean gold and silver mines were opened to the world by steam railroads. He still gets out into the mining camps of the warmer regions of Arizona, in spite of his 88 years and his residence on the mountains and on the border of civilization in North and South America since the latter '50's.

"Your story about how you worked the tunnel without a dollar coming in," said Major Bucks, "reminds me of the easy way one could get gold when I struck that same county in the summer of 1879.

"I was young and reckless then, and, like nine-tenths of the men about me, I didn't exert myself to get any more gold than was necessary to have an easy time about camp, to gamble and to go down to 'Frisco for an occasional frolic. Sometimes now I wonder if it is not all a dream, and whether I ever did really pan out $75 and $100 worth of nuggets and dust in one day.

"One June day in 1880 three of us young chaps left Hangtown, now Placerville, on a prospecting tour up the Yuba River. It was no trick to make money then. Every one had a sackful or so of gold lying around somewhere.

"We left our little sacks in a candle box at Mark Hopkins' store in Hangtown, and struck out for up the river. We packed our blankets, picks, pans and shovels, a rocker, a little grub, coffee pot and frying pan on a mule. Our sole idea was to make a fortune of a million or so during the next year, and then go back to Jersey and be the biggest men in the state.

"Just above Fenton's Bar we located a claim on virgin ground and went to work. We dug and panned and rocked just an hour by the watch. The clean-up weighed four ounces of clean gold.

"That was an ounce each, or at the rate of ten ounces each for a full day's work. An ounce of gold was worth about $17 at that time.

"We held a consultation. Even big as our profits were, we weren't satisfied, for word had come down to us from Bull's Bend that some men there had been making a thousand dollars each in two days. A little figuring showed us that we were fools to stay where we could make only $160 or $170 in a day.

"The next day we struck out for Bull's Bend, leaving our puny diggings at Fenton's Bar to a party of Irish boys who had just come into the country. And what do you think? In one year those cusses cleaned up more than $300,000 in the diggings that we had thrown aside. We fooled around Bull's Bend for four or five months, making barely enough to keep us in grub and clothes."

A Street Bout in Korea

Gilliams Service

In Seoul, Korea, this is an everyday scene, as fencing is the national pastime and has been for generations. Even at that, bouts like this in some by-streets of the city always attract an interested gallery and each resounding whack and thud is greeted with shouts of encouragement. The participants are well protected by mask-head protection and gauntlets, and well they may, for the way they flay each other with dummy swords is worthy of their revered ancestors.